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# Toilet Training

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## Toilet Training

Parents are often under pressure from friends and relatives to begin toilet training their child as early as possible. Literature and advice on the subject seem endless. Impatience or anxiety about toilet training can lead to the use of ineffective methods. This could result in disappointment, frustration and shame. Here are some tips to help you toilet train your baby Susan in a positive way.

### What is the Key?

Toilet training depends on a child's physical development, her communication skills and her willingness to try. Is she *ready*? A child is usually physically ready to be trained around the age of two (or even considerably later) when her control is more fully developed. By then she should have the necessary words to express her needs.

The following clues may tell you that Susan is ready to be toilet trained.

- Does she show discomfort after a bowel movement (BM)?
- Can you anticipate her BM's; for example, by physical signs, pushing, grunting or getting red in the face?
- Are her BM's becoming regular?
- Is she aware when she is urinating?
- Can she hold urine for longer periods?
- Can she understand simple directions?

## What Next?

Begin by teaching your child the words you want her to use. At two this should not be difficult. For example, when you are changing her diapers you might say, "Susan had a BM," or "Susan is wet."

She will soon be telling you: "I had a BM." Use language she can understand and speak in a calm, matter-of-fact voice.

Try to wait until summer to begin toilet training, unless your child is definitely ready to begin sooner. This will make life easier for both of you, as she will be wearing fewer clothes.

Keep a potty in the bathroom for several weeks before toilet training begins so that she becomes familiar with its use. The age at which she is introduced to the potty is not important, as long as she is not pressured to use it. You could let her get used to her potty as early as one year but she won't likely understand what it's for until considerably later.

Let her observe you in the bathroom. Verbalize your actions by saying, for example, "Mommy and Daddy use the toilet for their BM's. Pretty soon you'll be able to use your own small toilet."

Bowel training usually precedes bladder training, because it is easier to control.

A potty is preferable to the toilet at first, because it is less frightening. Its scaled-down size enables her to get on and off by herself. Help her to relax while she is on the potty by letting her play with a toy, or by staying with her.

When you're certain she is ready for training, watch for physical signs that indicate she is having a bowel movement. Ask her if she would like to sit on the potty, but respect her refusal to do so. Make her feel comfortable. Don't try to regulate her immediately by expecting her to use the potty every day.

Never use medication to regulate bowel movements. This may lead to problems later.

If she is successful on the potty, be sure to praise her. After a while, vary toilet procedures by putting her on the regular toilet and holding her if she wishes. Place a box in front of the toilet to use as a step. This encourages use of the toilet and helps your child to become less dependent on the potty.

## Phase Two

Bladder control occurs later in the second year and is distinguished by two developments: waking control and, later, sleeping control.

Be sure your child knows the words to express urination. "I'm wet.", "I'm wetting myself." or "I need to wet." are easy statements for her to learn. Tell her that she is now old enough to wear panties most of the time, instead of diapers. Make sure that her clothing is easy for her to take off. (Boys should be taught to urinate standing up. Father or brother can set an example. Again, use a box as a step to the toilet.)

With daytime control established, sleeping control usually follows quite naturally.

## Some Do's

- Toilet training is an important part of social development.
- Be positive and casual in your approach to it.
- Ignore accidents and praise successes. Your child will feel good and will try harder next time.
- Give supportive statements: "Having a BM is hard work, but you did it, Susan."
- Respond immediately when your child asks to go to the washroom. Let her sit quietly until she is finished.

## Some Don'ts

- Don't make your child feel anxious about toileting.
- Don't chastise her for accidents or failures.
- Don't moralize or punish. This causes feelings of rejection and inadequacy. When accidents happen, she'll soon learn that it's nicer to have clean, dry diapers or training pants.
- Never force her to use the potty against her wishes. She may not need it and will feel badly for not fulfilling your expectations.
- Never pressure her to stay on the potty or toilet by saying: "You'll stay there until you've done something."

## Remember

- Relapses in training should be expected, especially during illness, fatigue, family stress, or special events, such as the arrival of a new baby.
- Toilet training cannot be learned in a day. Teach her gradually so she can take the time to become accustomed to this new habit.
- Accidents are often inconvenient and embarrassing. Toilet training often leaves parents feeling frustrated, angry and disappointed, especially when progress is slow or uneven.
- You can minimize problems by being patient and confident that your child will master toilet training.

**Editor's Note:** For simplicity 'she' is used in this pamphlet but the general material applies equally to boys and girls.

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